GENOCIDE, THE HOLOCAUST, AND TRIAGE

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Since its historical entry into world history the German people has always found itself in need of space. . . . Our people has never been able to settle this need for space, except through conquest by the sword or through a reduction of its own population.

Adolf Hitler, 1928

In May 1984, the Associated Press wired to American newspapers the recent findings of the Population Reference Bureau, a Washington-based research group that studies population trends. Beyond announcing that nearly 4.8 billion human beings now inhabit the earth, the bureau indicated that our planet's population has doubled since World War II. Not only did the world's population increase by almost 85 million in the past year, the report went on to say, but there will be 5 billion persons here by 1987. That number will rise to 6 billion by the end of the twentieth century. Within forty years, the world's population will double. Strangely, however, the AP's story took no notice of forces that could disrupt these trends. Such interruptions, hastened by exploding population growth, ought not to be taken lightly. Nuclear threats make that fact obvious. So does the history of genocide. More people exist than anyone needs. That condition—more or less—has always held. It makes history, as Hegel deftly said, a slaughter-bench.

Where more people exist than are wanted, man-made death is never far behind. One of the most persuasive teachers of that lesson was Adolf Hitler. Although not sufficient, his leadership was a necessary condition for the Holocaust, the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews. As suggested by the quotation with which this essay begins, Hitler believed that
the world's population was too large, and that therefore space, entailing opportunity as well as geography, was lacking for the German people. His self-proclaimed mission was to lead them to their rightful increase and dominion.

Significantly, Hitler's statement comes from his so-called Zweites Buch.\(^2\) Drafted in 1928, this sequel to Mein Kampf was suppressed by Hitler himself. It is not necessary to assess the various explanations that have been offered to account for that fact—the work was identified in 1958 and published in German three years later—but the issue that provoked Hitler to write is noteworthy. As Telford Taylor tells the story, "the question of the South Tyrol was an especially sharp thorn in the Nazi flesh" (p. xvi). For more than a century preceding the end of World War I, this Alpine region south of the Brenner Pass, much of it German-speaking, lived under Austrian rule. Thanks to the Treaty of St. Germain, Italy gained control of the area. Its policy toward the German population was benign until Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime introduced a program of Italianization. By March 1928, for example, Italian had become the language of religious instruction in South Tyrol, prompting strong criticism from the Austrian Chancellor, Ignaz Seipel. When Mussolini returned the favor by recalling his ambassador from Vienna, the anti-Italian reaction in Germany as well as in Austria was considerable.

Hitler, however, did not profit from this feeling. On the contrary, having praised Mussolini in Mein Kampf, where he also asserted that unrest in the South Tyrol was a Jewish-inspired scheme to discredit Il Duce and to threaten German-Italian cooperation, Hitler found himself "attacked from the 'folkish' and nationalist quarter as 'soft' on an issue of German irredentism" (p. xvii). Ironic though the facts just mentioned may be, Hitler's Zweites Buch concentrated on the status of South Tyrol. If the passing of the crisis influenced him to withhold the book when it became apparent that nothing could be gained by publishing a work that would "belabor an issue on which he and his Party were on the defensive," Hitler's Zweites Buch still shows that the problem of not enough space and too many people, or at least not enough space for the right kinds of people, was never far from his mind at the time (p. xx). Nor would those issues dwindle in importance as Hitler came to power and unleashed genocide in his quest for Lebensraum. After the Anschluss, Hitler may have been content to leave South Tyrol under Mussolini's jurisdiction, even though he was unsuccessful in urging its German population to emigrate to the Reich, but both outcomes drove home the governing principles Hitler had written down in 1928:

Politics is history in the making. History itself is the presentation of a people's struggle for existence. I deliberately use the phrase "struggle for existence" here because in truth that struggle for daily bread, equally in peace
and war, is an eternal battle against thousands upon thousands of resistances just as life itself is an eternal struggle against death. (P. 5)

No people have ever been wanted less than the Jews were by Hitler. His anti-Jewish campaign was so virulent that it reduced Jews to sub- or non-human status, thus making their elimination easier. Under Hitler, then, the Nazis unleashed their genocide on the Jews. The success of this attack is corroborated by the fact that even now debate rages about whether *genocide* is a category that is adequate to encompass the Holocaust. At issue in those debates is the Holocaust's uniqueness. Consider, therefore, the useful distinctions that Yehuda Bauer makes by designating the Holocaust as "the extreme case" of genocide.3

To Bauer, genocide suggests a continuum, each instance aimed at destroying a people in one way or another. The Holocaust belongs at its "farthest point" because, as Hitler's targets, "every Jew—man, woman, and child—was to be killed" (pp. 331-32). Genocide includes a multitude of sins, but heretofore its instances have not aimed at the total annihilation Hitler eventually directed against the Jews.4 Hence, the Holocaust is unique. Yet, owing to the possibility that total annihilation might in some time or place become the aim again, Bauer contends that the term "Holocaust" can be "not only the name by which the planned murder of the Jewish people is known," but also "a generic name for an ideologically motivated planned total murder of a whole people."5 Just as history contains a variety of Holocaust-related events, such as the Armenian massacres, there may also be Holocausts in the offing, a possibility made all the more real since *the* Holocaust occurred.

If genocide is a continuum with Holocaust at its farthest point, how are genocide's victims to be understood? If there is not some universal characteristic that they all share, do they at least have what the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein would have called a family resemblance? The import of such questions is more than historical; it also directs us toward the future. For if people become potential targets of genocidal campaigns for reasons that at least resemble one another, that knowledge can alert the endangered and those who care about them.

Such concerns are among those that orient the scholarship of Richard L. Rubenstein, whose writings are as far-ranging as they are controversial, as perceptive as they are discomforting. An authorship taking him from *After Auschwitz* (1966) to *The Cunning of History* (1975) has recently been enhanced by *The Age of Triage* (1983), his most disturbing and hence most important work to date. There will be more to say about that book, but first *The Cunning of History*. It not only focused on the Holocaust but did so by accenting motifs already noted in this essay.

For example, while impressed by the unprecedented features of the Holocaust, Rubenstein affirmed that more understanding is to be gained
by regarding Auschwitz as part of a continuum of human action than by putting it in a category entirely its own. Next, although *The Cunning of History* makes no mention of Hitler's *Zweites Buch*, Rubenstein knew the importance of Hitler's conviction that Germany "was always an overpopulated area." Rubenstein further understood that Hitler's appraisal along those lines was not limited to quantitative considerations. Overpopulation was a qualitative matter for Hitler as well. In fact, a witches' brew of quantitative and qualitative concerns about population was not only what drove Hitler to establish the death camp as one of the twentieth century's fundamental realities. That melange could also reveal the Holocaust's significance in light of the recognition that the world's population is nearly 4.8 billion and escalating at a startling pace. With the Holocaust as the precedent, mass murder—if not genocide or Holocaust—might well be the remedy of choice to achieve a "final solution" to the problems created by hordes of people who are unwanted by the powers that be.

Stressing that the power of a political state is essential for Holocaust, if not for every form of genocide, *The Cunning of History* packs an incisive array of views into little more than a hundred pages. But none drew more vigorous response than Rubenstein's simplest and most fundamental thesis: "The Nazi elite clearly understood that the Jews were truly a surplus people whom nobody wanted and whom they could dispose of as they pleased.... In terms of German ideology, the Jews were a surplus population because of the kind of society the Germans wanted to create." He would expand those claims in *The Age of Triage*, but already Rubenstein's point was that established interests had for centuries engaged in the riddance of redundant populations. The Nazis' handling of the Jews implemented an extremely calculated procedure for dealing with an old problem. It also involved a host of particular features—typically involving the blending of ancient strands of religious anti-Semitism with modern ideologies of nationalism and racism. But Rubenstein's major insight was that the category of "surplus people" was a crucial one to employ in relation to the Holocaust because it could help us understand not only how that event is unique but also how it is symptomatic of features that may be endemically destructive in our current ways of life.

Lest he be misunderstood, Rubenstein carefully stated that "the concept of a surplus population is not absolute. An underpopulated nation can have a redundant population if it is so organized that a segment of its able-bodied human resources cannot be utilized in any meaningful economic or social role" (p. 10). That qualification, however, did not prevent criticism for introducing population redundancy into an interpretation of the Holocaust. Even going on to clarify that "a surplus or redundant population is one that for any reason can find no viable role in
the society in which it is domiciled," Rubenstein is still attacked for holding that the Holocaust—though exceptional—is still one of many instances of state-sponsored population elimination.8

A theory is only as good as its ability to cope with the objections brought against it. By indicating some typical challenges directed against Rubenstein's view about the Holocaust and surplus populations, responding to each, and then elaborating other dimensions of his vision, Rubenstein's contributions to an understanding of the age of genocide can be appraised. As to the criticisms—some explicit, others implied—the first of seven examples comes from Jacob Katz. Responding to statements made by Rubenstein at a conference on "The Holocaust—A Generation After," he asserted that Rubenstein was mistakenly trying to analyze the Holocaust "in Darwinian terms."9 Specifically, contended Katz, the hypothesis that the Jews were a surplus people was not credible because the Nazis, even during the intensity of the Holocaust itself, "used Jews very profitably in SS factories" (ibid.). Variants of this argument have frequently been raised against Rubenstein from time to time, but they are not telling. Katz, for instance, undermines his own analysis by acknowledging that decisions to use Jews for slave labor were often overturned and instead those workers were dispatched to the gas chambers. Or, it could be added, many others were simply worked to death, as The Cunning of History testifies. Coupling these notes with Rubenstein’s basic qualification that population redundancy is not simply a matter of numbers, Katz' objection remains beside the point.

In the same forum, Alice A. Eckardt took a different approach. She concurred with Rubenstein that the Nazi treatment of the Jews was not adequately handled by calling it an irrational aberration. Instead there was a kind of rationality in the Nazis' anti-Jewish campaign. But, she insisted, that rationality was not to be located in any Nazi perception that the Jews were superfluous. Rather, the Nazis looked on the Jews "as an absolute hindrance, a virus, a cancer" (p. 260). They were, in short, "the incarnation of evil" (ibid.). From the Nazi perspective, then, it could have made good sense to be rid of the Jews. To suggest, however, that the Jews were targets simply because they were superfluous will not do.

Not much more than Katz' remarks do Eckardt's undermine The Cunning of History. Indeed, they reflect it, for her argument, ironically, has the unintended consequence of supporting Rubenstein's analysis. The concept of a surplus population is not absolute; instead it encompasses the factors that Eckardt rightly stresses. People—and the Nazi outlook did not simply deny that Jews were people—do not become classified as viruses and cancers unless those beings are already regarded as unwanted in the extreme. Propaganda and ideology utilizing such classifications do so to underscore the more effectively how radically
these people are unneeded, how they have no viable role in the scheme of things controlled by the powers that be in the region where they happen to dwell.

A third criticism has been advanced by Shlomo Avineri. He takes Rubenstein to task for being "a functional structuralist" (p. 262). Rubenstein, claims Avineri, tries too hard to subsume particular events under universal categories. Such attempts may be part of a noble tradition, but in the case of the Holocaust, avers Avineri, they will not enable Rubenstein to do what he wants. For there simply is not evidence to substantiate the claim that the Nazis regarded the Jews as surplus and therefore decided to exterminate them. On the other hand, there is abundant evidence that the Nazis were fundamentally anti-Semites. The Jews became targets not because they were superfluous but because the Nazis hated Jews so thoroughly. The full measure of that hatred was taken at Auschwitz.

One ought not trifle with a scholar of Avineri's deserved stature. Thus, it is welcome that Rubenstein can accept his points and find that the surplus people hypothesis is not jeopardized but strengthened. Rubenstein would be the first to agree with Avineri's observation that "Nazi antisemitism was not instrumental to Nazi aims but basic and immanent to them" (ibid.). Genocide, on the other hand, is instrumental. "Seldom elected by a government as an end in itself," Rubenstein has since pointed out, "genocide is always a means of eliminating a target population that challenges an economic, political, cultural, religious, or ideological value of the politically dominant group." Hence, Avineri's stress on Nazi anti-Semitism indicates why the Jews were targeted, but in being targeted, the Jews also revealed themselves to be a surplus people as far as the Nazis were concerned. Rubenstein's point is rightly a functional one. Practically speaking, Nazi anti-Semitism meant Jewish superfluity. Already we have noted that Hitler had much to say about overpopulation, but even if Nazi rhetoric did not speak directly and consistently about the Jews as surplus people, actions spoke louder than words. Moreover, since there is no genocide without human redundancy of one kind or another, Nazi actions do support the contention that the Holocaust belongs on Bauer's continuum of genocide, albeit at its extremity. In spite of Avineri's contention to the contrary, the perspective of a functional structuralist, if the term is apt, can illumine the Holocaust's place in the larger scheme.

The previous objections find fault with Rubenstein's account because its emphasis on surplus people seems to overlook certain economic considerations and features of Nazi ideology. If those objections are much weaker than purported, the plot thickens when Berel Lang questions the explanatory power of Rubenstein's appeal to "the superfluity of a certain proportion of the population." Lang does not elaborate his objection, but it seems to entail the belief that the surplus people category is itself
rather superfluous when it comes to telling us how or why mass murder takes place in particular circumstances. If Lang's briefly stated position were expanded, it might claim that Rubenstein's concept says both too much and too little. We do not know what "surplus" means until we look at particular cases where allegedly surplus people are to be found. When we do such looking, moreover, we find that "surplus" is indeed not an absolute idea but so extremely relative that its meaning incorporates any number of specific reasons why a particular people might be targeted and killed. In the process, the concept covers so much as to become nearly meaningless.

Lang's criticism, implicit as well as explicit, has not gone unnoticed by Rubenstein. The best evidence for that claim is that the author of *The Cunning of History* planned early on to produce the sequel, *The Age of Triage*, that would buttress the propositions about surplus populations that were offered only in germinal form in the earlier study. As will be pointed out in more detail below, the latter book analyzes numerous historical examples to show that man-made mass death is linked with perceptions of population redundancy. That redundancy is not merely a matter of semantics, either. Historically, people tend to be killed en masse when dominant powers deem them unnecessary and unwanted. The factors that can put people into that risk are myriad, and hence the utility of Rubenstein's theory about surplus populations emerges. If one focused only on the many and varied particulars that lead to man-made mass death, the continuities among those events would be overlooked. Genocide and even Holocaust are concepts that help us to see the links. Rubenstein's contribution, vastly meaningful, is to show that the specific reasons for genocide also involve a pattern, one to which his intentionally elastic concept of surplus population directs us. The explanatory power of the concept may not be its primary hallmark—for explanation one must go more to the details in particular cases. The concept's strength is instead in its synthesizing capacity, which in turn enables us to see before it is too late the diverse ways and places in which people might find themselves functionally redundant and destined to be targets for riddance.

Other interpreters have taken *The Age of Triage* into account and still find Rubenstein vulnerable where his theories about surplus people are concerned. John Patrick Diggins, for example, echoes Berel Lang by wondering whether Rubenstein's appeal to the problem of surplus populations really tells us why genocide happens. "For all his admirable research," Diggins says of Rubenstein, he "cannot establish the precise cause, or even causes, of genocide, and this is profoundly disturbing." This critic reasons that a historian "must demonstrate that causes originated in man's conscious intentions and purposes" before claiming to know why human consequences turned out as they did. On Diggins' reading, then, population superfluity could only be a cause of genocide if
awareness of such a superfluity existed and the superfluity yielded a conscious motive that led people to kill accordingly. Such evidence, he implies with Avineri, is hard to come by not only in the Holocaust but in other genocidal scenarios as well.

Rubenstein, I believe, would be agreeable to Diggins' insistence on documentation. One issue between them, however, is where such documentation can or must be found. Again, Rubenstein's methodology places less emphasis on what people say than on what they do. People do not have to be overtly labeled "surplus" in order to be redundant; nor do the powers that be have to pronounce that there is a problem of surplus population in order for them to document through their actions that they do, in fact, think one exists. The ultimate documentation is extermination. Diggins may wish to wait for more explicit documentation, but if he does so, it is not clear that his historical positivism will show itself superior to Rubenstein's willingness to let practice document belief.

Incidentally, Diggins' skepticism notwithstanding, Rubenstein has boldly asserted that the Holocaust "can be fully comprehended in terms of the normal categories of history, social science, demography, political theory and economics." The credibility of that claim, of course, will depend on what is meant by "fully comprehended," but at this juncture Rubenstein's Hegelian reach may well exceed an existential grasp. For if human experience cannot ultimately account for itself—and it cannot—then it is hard to see how "the normal categories of historical and socio-political analysis" can fully comprehend the Holocaust or anything else, for that matter. Yet, even if Rubenstein's assertion on this particular issue is not well-founded, a major point in his favor remains. He defends the Holocaust's comprehensibility to contest perspectives that mystify the Holocaust by stressing that the event eludes rational comprehension. Probably the truth is closer to Rubenstein's side than not. Admitting that we lack the requisite metaphysical certainty to comprehend fully any historical occurrence, the disciplines of history, social science, demography, political theory, and economics nevertheless do tell much about how and why Auschwitz appeared. The Holocaust's "incomprehensibility" is more in the beholder's eye than in the facts themselves.

Where the Holocaust is concerned, however, the nature of the facts remains in question, and to some extent that will probably be true forever. An example is found in the research of Steven T. Katz, who by implication disagrees with some of Rubenstein's economic emphases in interpreting how and why the Jews became a redundant population destined for mass death. Particularly in The Age of Triage, Rubenstein has held that the West's modernization process tended to render Jews surplus as it turned them away from being an economically complementary class, rendered them instead a source of instability and
conflict, and thus set them up for the kill. Not so, says Katz. The decisive turning point on the road to Auschwitz was instead a specific kind of anti-Semitic racism. Close to Alice Eckardt's perspective, Katz' suggests that this racism was "microbial" and "parasitological." Such racism reflects and inculcates the belief that inferior races will destroy superior ones in ways analogous to those that exist when deadly disease-causing agents invade human life. Racism of this kind brooks no compromise. Be killed or kill—completely—is its imperative.

Once more, nothing in Rubenstein's theory would require him to deny that Katz' analysis has much in its favor. But Rubenstein can also reply that Katz' account itself would be more credible if it took economics with greater seriousness. Katz stresses that the content of the Nazis' anti-Semitic racism had very little relationship to any empirical realities. Its irrationality was a major characteristic, one that gave this ideology peculiar power because it was beyond disconfirmation. Rubenstein, however, urges a second look. Perhaps this anti-Semitism is not quite so irrational, not quite so much a thing unto itself, if we see it more than Katz does as an effect of economic relationships gone sour. Understanding that "no single cause can explain a historical phenomenon," Rubenstein invites us to consider that realities of all kinds are more interrelated and continuous than they are discrete and disparate. Rubenstein's approach has the advantage of fitting that pattern better than Katz'. It does so by illuminating the economic factors in Nazi anti-Semitic racism, thus making the latter no less hideous but more intelligible than Katz' stress on its irrationality can do.

Although Richard Rubenstein's critics contest much that he says, even they are likely to agree that he is on target in asserting that ours is the age of triage. How we arrived there and what we might do about that outcome are two of his main concerns as his book by that title assesses the extent of fear and hope in an overcrowded world. Having explored several major objections with which Rubenstein's Holocaust theories have had to contend, plus some of the rejoinders that can appropriately be made to them, it will be well to conclude with an overview of The Age of Triage, drawing out of Rubenstein's total vision of our past and future his accent on the importance of religious as well as social scientific reflection.

A socioeconomic sorting that saves some ways of life by dispatching others, triage testifies to the ascendancy of a powerfully practical form of human rationality. Casting his point in economic terms, Rubenstein stresses how decisive it has been that people discovered how to produce a surplus. For thereby, he asserts, they also took "the first step in making themselves superfluous." Already we have observed that current concerns about global population find the world containing many more people than anyone needs. Rubenstein recognizes, in turn, that this perceived population redun-
dancy exists partly because of sheer numbers but even more because the dominant intentions that energize modern society tend to be governed by the belief that money is the measure of all that is real. More than any other, he claims, that belief drives the modernization process, which has been under way and intensifying for centuries. One effect of this process is that the intrinsic worth of people diminishes. Their worth is evaluated functionally instead. Hence, if persons are targeted as non-useful—they can be so regarded in any number of ways, depending on how those in power define their terms—a community may find it sensible to eliminate the surplus from its midst. In modern times, that action has been facilitated, indeed instigated and promoted, by governmental power. Triage, then, entails state-sponsored programs of population elimination: through eviction, compulsory resettlement, expulsion, mass warfare, and outright extermination—roughly in that order. This winnowing process, more or less extreme in its violence, enables a society to drive out what it does not want and to keep what it desires for itself.

Persistently intrigued by history's continuity as well as by its cunning, Rubenstein links modernization and mass death in a study that encompasses such apparently diverse events as the enclosure movement in England during the Enlightenment, the nineteenth-century famine years in Ireland, and a variety of twentieth-century events—a non-exhaustive list would include the Armenian genocide, the slaughter of Soviet citizens under Stalin, the destruction of the European Jews under Hitler, and the devastation of Cambodia. Taken alone, Rubenstein's political interpretation is stunning enough, but The Age of Triage does more because its author has not abandoned his grounding in religion and theology to turn exclusively to socioeconomic analysis. On the contrary, an age of triage makes the vitality of religion and theology more critical than ever. It is within this perspective that Rubenstein should be understood when he states that "no theological enterprise, that is, no consideration of the ultimate values that move men and women, can be adequate to its task if it ignores critical political and social theory, especially insofar as these modes of inquiry seek to comprehend the conditions under which men attempt to conduct their lives both individually and collectively" (p. v).

Explicitly and implicitly, God is both absent and present in The Age of Triage. Historically, for example, Rubenstein argues that Western monotheism desacralized the world, leaving human power free to exploit nature and to kill far too much with impunity. Ironically, the same God found in the theologies that were instrumental in unleashing the modernizing process has also been its victim, eclipsed by an advancing civilization that has produced in tandem benefit and destruction, both in unprecedented abundance. Yet, looking toward the future, Rubenstein hints at—indeed he yearns for—a religious revival that might transmute
humanity's propensity to move, as Benjamin Nelson put it, "from tribal
brotherhood to universal otherhood" (p. 7). Such a revival, hopes
Rubenstein, would convert us so that we are "born again as men and
women blessed with the capacity to care for each other here and now"
(p. 240). God's place in an age of triage ought not to be the least of our
concerns. Consider, then, four of Rubenstein's fundamental proposi-
tions. Each merits a governing role in late twentieth-century theology
and religious reflection.

1. "Modern civilization is largely the unintended consequence of a
religious revolution" (p. 230). Western monotheism, contends Ruben-
stein, replaced magic and belief in a spiritualized nature by insisting that
there is one and only one God who is the sovereign creator of heaven
and earth. The success of Judaism and Christianity inadvertently paved
the way for the secular outlooks that result in triage. True, these tradi-
tions affirmed that the earth is the Lord's. Men and women, moreover,
were to be obedient to God's will. That will, in turn, would make itself
known in history, and there not everything was to be permitted. Bonds
of moral obligation, underwritten by God's judging power, were
claimed to be in force. Human life, formed in God's image, appeared to
be even more sacred than it had been prior to monotheism's eminent
domain.

Neither in practice nor in theory, however, does history conform
entirely to conscious intention. In spite of and even because of mono-
theism's moral components, a course unfolded in which nature and even
human life itself came to be regarded as subject to the mastery of politics
and economics. Religions predicated on revelation within history un-
leashed reason in ways that transmuted the moral authority of revelation
itself. A biblical God inspired a secular consciousness, and at times God
disappeared in the process. Providence became Progress. Progress
meant the triumph of a calculating, functional rationality whose Golden
Rule was Efficiency.

My account, if not Rubenstein's, is overly simple. Still, the power of
its drift remains. Religions and theologies are loaded dice because they
always contain more options for development than the limitations of
immediate consciousness can comprehend. In an age of triage, we have
learned that lesson to our sorrow. Yet Rubenstein's point is that we can
be aware of it now. That awareness enjoins a warning, which takes us
to a second proposition deserving of attention.

2. "In a crisis, a secularized equivalent of the division of mankind
into the elect and the reprobate could easily become a controlling image"
(p. 216). Western monotheism's emphasis on a God of History has
typically included the idea that some groups or persons are specially
called. They are linked together and with God in relations of covenant.
At their best, these convictions have singled people out for service, but
nearly all of these doctrines of election and covenant have also been
extremely volatile. Separating people, they have induced a host of rivalries. Those rivalries and their offspring, Rubenstein avers, have more than a little to do with triage.

Unintended consequences are no less real than those that are consciously desired. The former, in fact, may be the more devastating precisely because their full power remains hidden until the effects are felt. In our religious context, the crucial link between theology, religious reflection, and triage lurks in the fact that Western monotheism has much to do with economic versions of divine election and covenant. Within such perspectives, poverty and wealth are much more than economic conditions. They entail divine judgment and just desert. Thus, their driving force can be not one of ministering to the poor but rather of eliminating them so that the position of the elect remains unthreatened.

The theology of election and covenant sketched here sounds perverse. It is. But Rubenstein's point is that it is too simple, too convenient, only to protest that a tradition has been distorted. No doubt distortion exists, but perhaps the more important point is that what we say about God is usually a two-edged sword. That fact holds with respect even to the best examples of theology and religious reflection that we can cite. For the seeds that sprouted into destructive versions of election and covenant were not sowed first by the spiritually bankrupt or by the intellectually corrupt. They are gifts from the giants of Western religion. The issue that remains, then, is whether theology and religious reflection can speak in ways to avert the crises that fuel forces bent on triage because they see the world in terms of the elect and reprobate.

3. "We are by no means helpless in meeting the challenge confronting us" (p. 224). Economically, argues Rubenstein, the basic remedy for triage would be to create a social order that provides a decent job for any person who is willing to work. His optimism is muted, however, because he knows that the implementation of his economic remedy is anything but an economic matter alone. In fact, the forms of practical rationality that govern modern economic thinking tend to mitigate against policies of full employment. The challenge that confronts us, then, is largely a spiritual one. Unless men and women are resensitized religiously, the resources to avert triage are likely to be hopelessly inadequate.

Rubenstein thinks that we need nothing less than "an inclusive vision appropriate to a global civilization in which Moses and Mohammed, Christ, Buddha, and Confucius all play a role" (p. 240). To call Rubenstein's vision demanding understates the case. For, their universalizing tendencies notwithstanding, the major religious traditions have themselves been instrumental in "triaging" people "into the working and the workless, the saved and the damned, the Occident and the Orient" (p. 240). Rubenstein, of course, hopes that a new religious consciousness will build on the inclusive aspects of the major religious traditions,
excluding the exclusive features in the process. Yet a further difficulty is that, while the thinker and the theorist can point out the needed direction, they cannot manage the achievement of such a vision.

If the so-called death of God theologies have had their moment in the limelight and have now largely faded from view, the radical secularization of our time remains. Functionally, human reason in history tends toward Godlessness, a pattern that theology and philosophy may check but seem unlikely to reverse. It is Rubenstein's conviction that the needed reversal, one that would substantially reduce the prospects of triage, depends on "authentic religious inspiration" (p. 239). Such inspiration is not absent, but it cannot be called into being at will, least of all by intellectuals. Nor are religion's presently dominant forms characterized chiefly by the inclusiveness that Rubenstein advocates. If the age of triage is one in which God's best defense may be that God does not exist, our religious situation is truly a season of advent, of expectant waiting and seeking for the religious transformation we need.

4. "Theology seeks to foster dissonance-reduction where significant items of information are perceived to be inconsistent with established beliefs, values, and collectively sanctioned modes of behavior" (p. 132). Every religious tradition has to cope with evidence that disconfirms it. Triage itself is a case in point, for the experience of the death of God in our time has everything to do with the mass wasting of human life. Typically, theologians have apologized for God when the problem of evil has taken center stage. Specifically, they attempt to reduce the dissonance that arises when traditional claims about God's power and goodness collide with history.

The pertinent point here, however, is that Rubenstein's description of theology's function, whatever its validity, is not propounded by him as normative. On the contrary, his use of this description helps to identify meaningful work that remains for thinkers and theorists to do, even if they do not have the charisma to control the floodgates of religious inspiration. Rubenstein's Age of Triage is a theological statement, but his reflection does little to reduce dissonance. Its mood is instead quite the opposite. By calling attention to the Holocaust, to triage, to the reality that men and women too often kill with impunity, and by doing so in a way that questions the functional status of God in the world, Rubenstein's book is an exercise in dissonance production.

At least indirectly, Rubenstein suggests that an age of triage calls for more, not less, theology and religious reflection in that vein. Yet a note of caution should intrude. For the dissonance production that is needed today, Rubenstein implies, is not the kind that will intensify individualism and isolation. Rather, it ought to shatter such barriers and extend the boundaries of mutual social obligation. To move in that direction, however, is a task that will tax the best brain power we can muster, for powerful indeed are the drives and interests that find triage tempting...
because such sorting offers a solution as rational as it is final. Political and economic sophistication will need to join hands with theological acumen if religious thinkers are to do their dissonance-producing responsibly.

God's fate, as well as that of humankind, hangs suspended in an age of triage. Should God be real in any sense at all, God joins humankind in responsibility for history's destruction. Yet realistic hope against fear in an overcrowded world ought not to pronounce God dead. For history itself may induce shame and sorrow in some quarters, but if the age of triage is literally a Godless time altogether, the net effect of the defenseless victims will be to testify that the powers of death are irredeemably victorious. Hence the pages of The Age of Triage, particularly those that deal with the Holocaust, set an agenda for Western theology and religious reflection. In sum, it consists of at least these four imperatives: (1) Deconstruct the ties between Providence and Progress. (2) Destabilize distinctions between the elect and the damned. (3) Discern, as far as thought permits, ways beyond the self-regarding individualism that so often drives propensities toward triage. (4) Deploy the right kinds of dissonance.

In his Zweites Buch, Adolf Hitler had a different vision. Proclaiming himself a German nationalist, he announced a National Socialist foreign policy predicated on "folkish, racial insights" and "determined by the necessity to secure the space necessary to the life of our people." Knowing that vestiges and variants of that outlook are still very much a part of our world long after Hitler's demise, Richard Rubenstein assays genocide, the Holocaust, and triage to find ways beyond them. Admittedly there is little that is totally novel in that agenda, any more than Richard Rubenstein's account originated with him alone. The pieces have been lying there for some time. Yet, to Rubenstein's credit and for our benefit, he has worked the puzzle in a way that shows with particular urgency the vital tasks that must be attempted if catastrophe is to be forestalled in our overcrowded world.

NOTES

2. See Adolf Hitler, Hitler's Secret Book, trans. Salvator Attanasio, with an Introduction by Telford Taylor (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1983), p. 50. Additional references to this work and to others cited in this chapter are found in parentheses within the text.
4. For further discussion on Hitler's intentions concerning the Holocaust, see my article "How to Make Hitler's Ideas Clear?", *The Philosophical Forum* 16, nos. 1-2 (Fall-Winter 1984-1985), pp. 82-94.


16. Ibid., p. 3. Rubenstein's italics.